

Was Pres. Shonts (The New York Traction Magnate) "Vamped"

How "My Friend Amanda Thomas," Chorus Girl; Twice Married, Twice Divorced, Won the Old Millionaire's Affection and Turns Up With "Will" Giving Her His Estate



The Duchess de Chaumes (Theodora Shonts), from a miniature painting.—And fac-simile of printed passenger list of the "Olympic," showing how the Duchess and the little Duke were registered with their titles, and also showing Amanda Thomas's name.

CHAPTER IX.

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(Continued from Last Sunday)

READERS of this page last Sunday will recall Mr. Shonts's cruel attempt to make his daughters sit at the same table with Mrs. Amanda Thomas on the ocean liner *Olympic* as they all journeyed back to America at the outbreak of the war in 1914. But the high-spirited girls valued their own reputations, their high social position and moral standards too much to be threatened or cajoled into associating with such a person.

And there was another to consider—the little Duke de Chaumes, the son of Theodora Shonts, the grandson of Mr. Shonts. The Duchess de Chaumes, the child's mother, could not endure the thought of having the little Duke on terms of intimacy with Mrs. Thomas. Nor did she and her sister Marguerite wish the boy to carry into his after life any recollections of the woman who had coiled herself around his grandfather and his money. The Shonts girls still believed that their father would tire of Mrs. Thomas, would see through her schemes and transparent devices, and would get rid of her.

It was the hope of Mrs. Shonts, the wife, and the daughters that Mr. Shonts would wake up from his infatuation and put Amanda out of his life. They knew that all was not joy in the life of the Interborough president and his charmer. They had heard of rows and disputes and bitter quarrels. Mrs. Thomas was a determined personage, but so was Shonts. Some day they hoped that the old traction magnate would be done with her.

And they knew Shonts had been roundly scolded by friends whose opinions he valued. They had heard, too, of his being snubbed by friends on whose good nature he had presumed in trying to put Amanda over on them. They had even been told that Shonts had said to more than one person that he wished to heaven he could get rid of the Thomas woman—but that she had raved and sworn and threatened him if he dared cast her off. All these things led the family to hope that Amanda would some day, perhaps any moment, pass out of his life.

So the Duchess made every effort to keep the child away from the presence of the Thomas woman. But the little Duke seemed to have a strange fascination for Amanda. And this interest of Amanda Thomas in little Emanuel, tenth Duke de Chaumes, forms quite an extraordinary chapter in the history of Shonts and the woman who got away with his fortune. It must be remembered that Mrs. Thomas had a child of her own, Herbert Thomas, who is now about sixteen; little Emanuel is eleven.

Why was Mrs. Thomas strangely fascinated by that child of Theodora Shonts—the rightful heir to the Shonts fortune? Why did she give so much time and attention to Shonts's only grandchild?

It was on that memorable and miserable trip to America on the "Olympic" in 1914 that Mrs. Thomas first saw Shonts's grandson, the little Duke. The child was then six years old. As Mrs. Thomas ran her sharp eye over the printed passenger list she found her own name, "Mrs.

WHEN Theodore P. Shonts, president of New York's rapid transit lines, died last Summer the scandal which, during his lifetime, he had been able to smother soon burst into flame. And no wonder.

From the mystery and secrecy of the dead man's sick room emerged a remarkable figure—Mrs. Amanda Caskie Thomas. This woman had been Shonts's intimate companion, sharing his apartment, his automobile, his vacation outings and his check book. This former chorus girl had complete domination over the old traction magnate—while she and her little son nestled close to Shonts and his money she forbade her servants to allow Shonts's own wife and daughters to come near him.

Seizing everything worth carting away from his town apartment and country house, Mrs. Thomas produced an itemized bill of sale from Shonts of everything from a shoe horn to a baby grand piano, and in due time turned up with a "last will" leaving her the bulk of her millionaire admirer's estate. The old traction multi-millionaire, in some way, had been thoroughly well stripped of his millions! Did "my friend Amanda Thomas," as he calls her in his "will," get it all? The widow, Mrs. Shonts, has appealed to the courts to throw out this very suspicious and peculiar "last will," and she has also begun

actions to get the Shonts millions away from Mrs. Thomas, who, she swears, debauched Shonts and lured him into her power like a Vampire, by "her artifices, immorality and wiles."

Mrs. Amanda C. Thomas stands forth as a very remarkable figure. Her intimacy with Shonts she carried on with brazen indifference to what servants and others saw, said or thought. Surrounded by rich friends of herself and Shonts and the Interborough lawyers, she seems to have felt secure from exposure or legal consequences.

But the skeleton has been dragged forth from "my friend Amanda's" closet by the court proceedings begun by Mrs. Shonts. Did Mrs. Thomas "Vamp" President Shonts out of his fortune, as Mrs. Shonts, in effect, asserts? The courts will be asked to decide whether Mrs. Thomas shall be permitted to keep the Shonts fortune while the widow and children are left almost penniless. And it is a great moral issue as well as a legal issue, as Rev. Dr. Straton, of Calvary Baptist Church, pointed out in a recent sermon in these words:

"If the wronged wife is finally robbed and the other woman gets this money, will not the tendency be for every weak girl in the city to ask herself the question, 'If she did these things and got away with it and now flourishes, why may not I?'"

Amanda C. Thomas." And as she searched for such notables as might be on board her eye read this entry:

Chaumes, Duchess of and maid.
Chaumes, Hon. E. de, and nurse.

Well, that was an awkward situation for Amanda. The distinguished daughter of Shonts, the Duchess, refused to

have anything to do with her. But if Mrs. Thomas could not associate with the Duchess, she could pretend to be on intimate terms with "the Honorable Emanuel," the little Duke.

The child had a nurse, Nannie, who was a very devout Roman Catholic, and had a horror of immoral women. She could not stand having the child receive attentions from Mrs. Thomas, and she whisked the little Duke out of sight whenever Amanda approached or attempted any familiarities. All the way across the ocean Mrs. Thomas tried to get the boy to come to her. The nurse interfered, and whenever she saw Mrs. Thomas in the passageway or on the deck she turned away with the boy. It was necessary to keep the boy pretty well in the cabin, because the nurse declared that a cabin steward seemed to have been tipped to notify Mrs. Thomas whenever the nurse and the boy left their stateroom.

The nurse reported once she had seen this steward go to Amanda when the nurse and child left the cabin, and Mrs. Thomas immediately came to the passage and tried to attract the boy's attention.

Emanuel talked to his mother, the Duchess, about the "pretty lady" on board who had "waved her hands at him," and was much interested, but the Duchess warned him not to go near her. One evening the dining room steward gave the Duchess a box of ship's candy, which he said Mrs. Thomas had left at the table with instructions to him to "give it to my nephew, the Duc de Chaumes."

"You will please say to Mrs. Thomas," the Duchess instructed the steward, "that the Duc de Chaumes acknowledges her gift of candy and begs to say he threw it out the porthole."

It was an extraordinary situation on board that ocean liner. There was Shonts, the president of the Interborough and well known to many of the people on board. There were his two daughters, one a member of a very distinguished titled family in France, and his little nobleman son. And there was "that Thomas woman!"

Shonts had his steamer chair placed beside Amanda's steamer chair on one side of the deck. The daughters and the little Duke had their chairs on the opposite side of the deck. As far as possible the daughters allowed Shonts and his Amanda to have the right of way, to come and go on the promenade deck as they pleased. When Shonts and Amanda were on deck the daughters kept below; when they thought the Thomas woman was in her cabin they would venture on deck.

Of course the little Duke must have his exercise, so he and his nurse scouted about in remote corners to try to keep out of sight of Amanda.

"It was a most embarrassing and distressing voyage," the Duchess said. "My nurse would not even speak to Mrs. Thomas. This evidently enraged the Thomas woman, because my father came to me and complained about it and ordered me to discharge the nurse. I asked Mr. Shonts if he was commanding me to discharge Nannie because Mrs. Thomas so directed, and he said, 'Yes, because she does not treat Mrs. Thomas with respect.'"

There were quite a number of notable people on board the "Olympic." There was the great copper king, Mr. Daniel Guggenheim, and his wife, the Right Rev. Bishop Whelan, Mr. Alfred Gwynn Vanderbilt and others. The Duchess knew many of these notables, and through them met many others whom she had not already known. It is the Duchess' impression that her social standing among the notables on board and Mrs. Thomas's own equivocal

position on shipboard did not tend to make Amanda enjoy the trip across with her rich old admirer.

It was more or less a game of hide and seek on board the "Olympic" between Mrs. Thomas and the nurse who had the little Duke in her custody. And the strange fascination that this child seemed to have for Amanda persisted after all hands had left the ship and settled down in New York—Shonts and Amanda in the apartment house at Eighty-third street and West End avenue.

By one pretext and another Mrs. Thomas was continually endeavoring to get hold of or associate herself with the little Duke Emanuel, the Duchess declares. In spite of all the precautions of the Duchess and of the watchful nurse Nannie, Mrs. Thomas managed to mix in with Emanuel from time to time.

One day Mr. Shonts sent word that he would call in the automobile to take his little grandson out and buy him some boots. Suspecting no trick, the nurse Nannie dressed the child and went out and got into the car with him and Mr. Shonts. But instead of driving to the shoe shop the automobile went across Central Park to West End avenue, and all hands went upstairs to Mrs. Thomas's apartment, where breakfast was waiting.

After finishing his breakfast Shonts and Mrs. Thomas told the nurse and child to come along with them, and they went down to the shoe store. Mrs. Thomas picked out a big pair of rather rough looking boots, and the nurse suggested that they were rather too heavy for the child.

"You shut up!" the nurse declares Mr. Shonts said to her. "The boy will have what Mrs. Thomas wishes him to have."

On another occasion Mr. Shonts sent word to the Duchess that he wanted to take his grandson downtown to his office to show him to his office friends. When Shonts arrived with the automobile his daughter insisted that he let the nurse go along, but that she was not then ready, and Shonts said he was in a great hurry. He told the nurse to dress and meet him at the entrance to the park opposite the Hotel Plaza in half an hour. When the nurse met them Mrs. Thomas was in the automobile. They took the child to Mrs. Thomas's photograph studio and had some photographs taken, which the mother asserts were distressing distortions and made the child look very unattractive.

From time to time, on one pretence and another the child was brought to Mrs. Thomas's apartment and fed with candy. Several times, the Duchess asserts, the child was given candy and soon complained of sickness and pains in his stomach. These little illnesses and complaints, the mother says, were made much of by Mrs. Thomas, who again and again pointed out what a sickly, weak, unpromising youngster the grandson seemed to be.

Emanuel, on one occasion, came back from a visit to the Eighty-third street apartment and told his mother that Mrs. Thomas had made him ashamed by telling his grandfather in his presence that he was not a real boy because he was always saying his stomach hurt him. This aroused the Duchess' indignation, and she forbade the child to ever eat anything again which was offered him by the Thomas woman.

The next occasion when the child had been spirited over to the Thomas apartment and was offered candy he remembered his mother's warning and refused to eat any. The boy reported that Mrs. Thomas slapped his face and made him cry. The Duchess, as soon as this was told her, called Mr. Shonts on the phone and said that if he ever let Mrs. Thomas even talk to little Emanuel again she would "have the creature arrested." This was the last time the child was ever brought to Amanda's apartment.

Just before that occurrence Mrs. Thomas began busying herself with plans to have the boy examined by doctors. She had a good deal to say about how weak and unpromising he was, and insisted that he should be examined to see whether the child was hopelessly defective, physically and perhaps mentally. The Duchess was shocked to hear that Mrs. Thomas did manage to take the child to two physicians, and, she was told, then reported to Mr. Shonts that these doctors had told her that his grandson was a weakling and did not seem mentally strong.

The Duchess asserts that she immediately visited both

of these physicians, and demanded to know if they had authorized any such statements, and, having received denials from them, she went to Shonts and insisted that Mrs. Thomas be made to confront these physicians in her presence and repeat what she had said about the little Duke. Mr. Shonts was a good deal disturbed, but declined to carry out this proposal.

The Duchess also asserts that she found that the wretched photographs of the little Duke, which had been taken at Mrs. Thomas's studio, were kept constantly in front of Shonts on his dresser and in his library, and that she again and again discussed the unpromising features of the photographs. When she found this out, the Duchess declares, she insisted that Mr. Shonts change these pictures for others which showed the little Duke as he really was.

But why was Amanda Thomas so interested in and concerned about that child Emanuel?

It must be remembered that in 1914, on the "Olympic," Amanda had not fully completed the conquest of Shonts and his millions. She surely had played her cards with consummate skill. She certainly held the old traction magnate with bonds that were not easy to break.

But much still remained to be accomplished. Mrs. Shonts, the wife, was in disfavor—Amanda had pretty thoroughly supplanted the faithful wife. Mrs. Shonts needn't be considered; Amanda feared nothing from that direction.

But there were the Shonts daughters—two accomplished, attractive young women, with wide and distinguished social standing and acquaintance. Mrs. Thomas, with her reputation, could never hope to compete with the daughters of Mrs. Shonts in circles where high moral standards count for anything. And Mr. Shonts, down deep in his heart, loved his daughters.

Would the girls regain their old and natural place in their father's affections? They were a menace to Amanda and her plans. They were a problem. And some very interesting and highly amusing things will be told later of how Mrs. Thomas undertook to manage the affairs of these daughters.

But, after all, the ultimate heir would naturally be the grandson of Shonts, the little Duke de Chaumes. Miss Marguerite Shonts was not married until 1915, so her little son, Rutherford Bingham, did not enter Mrs. Thomas's calculations until 1916.

But the little Duke de Chaumes! If only the Shonts millions could be diverted from this little nobleman, this natural heir of the old traction magnate!

Did Amanda Thomas think of these things? Did "my friend Amanda" plan and scheme and plot to divert the Shonts fortune from grandson Emanuel to—to the son of Shonts's mistress, to her own child Herbert?

Well, listen to this testimony of Rosalie Stegner, a companion of Mrs. Thomas, an intimate of her household for several years and the governess of the boy Herbert:

"When I first entered the service of Mrs. Shonts as a companion and governess for her own child Herbert I was quite impressed with Mrs. Thomas's motherly interest in Mr. Shonts's little grandson, the Duke de Chaumes, whom they usually called 'Mannie,' a nickname for Emanuel.

"Many times Mrs. Thomas talked quite pathetically about how unfortunate it was that Mannie seemed so delicate. A child with such poor prospects of health she was sorry for, she said, because he could hardly hope for a future in the world of any consequence.

"Mr. Shonts seemed distressed at the clouded future of his little grandson, and quite grateful to Mrs. Thomas for her constant interest and concern for the child. "Can't you get Mannie to-day?" she would often say to Mr. Shonts in the morning. "He needs some one to play with, you know, and I will have Herbert play with him. He ought to be taken away once in a while from those crazy women who keep him around them all the time (meaning Mrs. Shonts and the two daughters). They do not seem to know how to make a real boy of him."

"And again she would tell Mr. Shonts that she would like to spend the afternoon at some engagement she had, but that really she felt it her duty to give a little time to the boy Mannie, and if Mr. Shonts would bring the boy